

## CHAPTER 6

# Receptions

Receptions are the most popular form of official entertaining for they allow wide variance in the number of guests invited and in the formality of the occasion. They range from the very formal, which might be a reception after 8 p.m. hosted by an ambassador in honor of visiting chief of state, to the less formal, perhaps that hosted by a military attaché from 8 to 10 o'clock in the evening in celebration of Armed Forces Day. The most common and least formal affair is held from approximately 6 to 8 o'clock, frequently in honor of a visiting official or in celebration of some event.

Characteristically, receptions differ from the simple cocktail party in that they are intended to honor individuals or a specific occasion, the atmosphere is somewhat more formal, their duration is prescribed, and there is always a receiving line.

The thoughtful host/hostess who plans a reception in honor of a high-ranking official will consult with the latter regarding a mutually agreeable date and time before ordering invitations. As indicated in Chapter 2, the person or the occasion being feted may be indicated on the invitation in several ways.

Guests should arrive before the receiving line disbands, normally within the first 35 minutes of the reception. The order of persons in the receiving line may vary with the type of occasion and desires of the hosting official.

The sequence which the Department of State follows for official functions in honor of high-ranking dignitaries is:

**Announcer – Host – Guest of Honor – Guest of Honor's Wife -- Host's Wife – Extra Man**

The announcer is often a military aide whose responsibility is to announce each guest by name.

The extra man avoids placing a woman at the end of the line. It is his function to move the guests into the reception area. Very often, however, this extra person will make the line entirely too long, in which case he may be eliminated.

An alternative which is equally appropriate and which makes the relationship of those receiving clearer to the guests is:

**Announcer – Host – Host's Wife – Guest of Honor – Guest of Honor's Wife – Extra Man**

In the event that the official who is hosting and/or guest of honor are women, observe the following:

**Announcer – Hostess – Hostess' Husband – Guest of Honor – Guest of Honor's Spouse – Extra Man (if a woman precedes him)**

When the guest of honor is a head of State, the host and hostess relinquish their positions and the line appears as:

**Announcer – Chief of State – Spouse of the Chief of State – Host – Hostess – Extra Man**

Guests do not shake hands with the aide/announcer. The guest should state his/her name and then proceed through the line. In the case of couples, the guest who has been invited because of his/her official capacity precedes his/her spouse or date through the line.

A typical pattern of introduction that the aide may use is as follows: The aide receives the name of the guest, turns to the host/hostess, after exchanging amenities, will turn to his/her spouse and say, "*Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Jones.*" The guest in proceeding down the line simply smiles, shakes hands, and greets each person with "*How do you do*" or "*Good evening.*" Since names do not travel well, the guest should repeat his/her name when necessary. One should never engage in extended conversation in a receiving line so as to avoid holding the line up.

### ATTIRE

The expected attire for a reception should be specified on the invitation. In general, the following rules apply:

*Afternoon or early evening reception (prior to 8 p.m.)*

- Generally informal
- Military women and men: Seasonally appropriate service dress uniform
- Civilian women: Street length or informal long dresses as current styles dictate
- Civilian men: Business suits

*Evening reception (after 8 p.m.)*

--Can be informal, formal, or very formal. If informal, the above rules apply. If formal, the following is appropriate:

- Formal (Black Tie)
  - Military men and women: Seasonal dinner dress uniform
  - Civilian women: Long formal gowns
  - Civilian men: Black tie; tuxedo
- Very formal (White Tie) – Very seldom worn
  - Military men and women: Formal dress uniform
  - Civilian women: Very formal gowns
  - Civilian men: White tie; full dress eveningwear

NOTE: One should remember that the above dress code is a strict adherence to protocol as one would see in Washington, D.C. Other areas of the country such as California or Hawaii are far less formal.